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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE  
TO RUEHBE/AMEMBASSY BELMOPAN 0007  
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6883  
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 0788  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 3843  
RUEHBH/AMEMBASSY NASSAU 0247  
RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN 0743  
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE 0555  
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 0418  
RUEHKG/AMEMBASSY KINGSTON 0764  
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO 0327  
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN 0453  
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0029

UNCLAS SAN JOSE 002800

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STATE FOR OES/PCI (LSPERLING)AND WHA/CEN (JMACK)  
STATE PLEASE PASS TO AID  
AID FOR SCOTT LAMPMAN  
SANTO DOMINGO FOR MICHAEL DONALD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [EAGR](#) [SOCI](#) [BH](#)

SUBJECT: BELIZE: TROPICAL FOREST CONSERVATION ACT OVERSIGHT BOARD  
MEETING

¶1. SUMMARY. REO attended the November 2, 2006 meeting of the Belize Tropical Forest Conservation Act Oversight Committee in remote Punta Gorda. The meeting provided an opportunity to review 2006 NGO reports, which focused on community outreach and enforcement activities, and approve 2007 workplans. While the PACT Foundation reported agreement in principle on guidelines for managing Foundation monies intended for a small grants program, subsequent private conversations suggested that differences among Foundation Board members may result in tasking another entity to manage Foundation funds. Oversight Committee members recommended to REO that a second debt for nature swap be considered. END SUMMARY.

¶2. REO attended the November 2 Board meeting of the Belize Tropical Forest Conservation Act (TFCA) Oversight Committee meeting (the Committee) in Punta Gorda, Belize at Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) headquarters. Members of the Committee included Artemio Osorio (Ministry of Finance); Wilbur Sabido (Ministry of Natural Resources); Marnix Perez (Protected Areas Conservation Trust-PACT); Valdemar Andrade (PACT Foundation - the Foundation); Anna Hoare (Belize Audubon Society-BAS); Edilberto Romero (Programme for Belize-PfB); Alex Martinez (Nature Conservancy); Wil Maheia (Toledo Institute for Development and Environment -TIDE); and REO on behalf of U.S. Embassy Belize. Also in attendance were Dominique Lizama (BAS), Herbert Haylock (PfB); and Angelica Chavarria (TIDE).

PATIENCE WEARS THIN OVER FOUNDATION NEGOTIATIONS  
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¶3. Andrade briefed the Committee on the status of the Foundation established by the U.S.-Belize TFCA agreement to support small grants to the wider Belize environmental NGO community. Divisions on the Foundation Board (the Board) between the NGOs (BAS, PfB, and TIDE) and government (PACT) prevented both agreement on procedures for managing Foundation funds and the scheduled October call for projects. (These divisions prompted NGO to insist that the Foundation hired its own lawyer to avoid relying on PACT counsel.) PACT and NGO Board members also differed over the base for calculating PACT's proposed 15 percent fee. PACT wished the base to be Foundation income earned (NGOs argued that PACT would have no incentive to actually disburse funds) while NGOs wished to apply the

percentage on actual monies disbursed (which placed the risk of delay in decision-making on PACT). Andrade reported that the November 2 Foundation Board meeting reached an agreement in principle on the issue, but NGOs reserved judgement until they could scrutinize the fine print.

¶4. Both NGOs and PACT privately raised the possibility that the Foundation administrator (currently PACT) might be replaced if agreement could not be reached. The three NGOs argued that any one of them can manage Foundation funds as effectively as PACT. Should the fund migrate to another institution, PACT would prefer to remove "PACT" from the Foundation name in order to establish a new vehicle for fundraising.

#### HIGHLIGHTS OF NGO REPORTS

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¶5. All reports emphasized improvement to park infrastructure like new guardhouses, renovated trails and renovated quarters. Each also highlighted community outreach, ranging from educational presentations to children's activities. The three NGOs noted that their freedom to cover park staff salaries gave them the security to leverage funds for more innovative projects than would otherwise be the case.

#### ¶6. BELIZE AUDUBON SOCIETY (BAS)

Seventy percent of Land Management funds were used to cover the salaries of ten field staff to manage 9 protected areas. The balance was used for administrative support and as partial payment for its Executive Director, accountant and Park Manager. Highlights included:

- Outreach to surrounding landowners to share information about illegal loggers and hunters transiting property.
- Cooperation with Armenia Mayan Women's Group to build a community gift shop, conduct birding walks, and hold a clean-up campaign.
- Mapped Saint Herman's Blue Hole and Guanacaste National Parks and conducted overflights and joint patrols with police and defense forces.

#### ¶7. TOLEDO INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT (TIDE)

TIDE's 2007 goals largely mirrored its 2006 activities. Of particular interest were its outreach efforts on behalf of the endangered Hicattée turtle and the second season of its innovative Freshwater Cup, in which local teams are as competitive in putting forward environmental projects as they are on the soccer field. Monies were spent on TIDE Private Lands Initiative enhancement, pushing its land acquisitions to 23,000 hectares, and on hiring rangers, a Science Director and a forest management specialist; and conducting river and ground patrols of private lands, including alternating patrols with three other NGOs of the Bladen Management Area. TFCA Support helped make possible:

- development of a medicinal garden, nurturing of 800 mahogany seedlings and the designation of two areas for scientific monitoring;
- 21 patrols with police and Forest Department officials that destroyed three gill nets and posted eleven signs on fishing and hunting regulations;
- participation in forestry/land conservation conferences and training opportunities on fire management, medical emergencies, and boat and engine maintenance.

#### ¶8. PROGRAMME FOR BELIZE (PFB)

PfB manages the Rio Bravo Conservation Area, which constitutes 4 percent of the country. In FY 2006, 2/3 of PFB funds covered salaries of park personnel; nearly 1/3 was used to cover administrative expenses; and 4 percent supported communication system maintenance, vehicle repair and aerial reconnaissance. TFCA funds leveraged a Wallace Foundation donation to support the study of the endangered Yellow Hooded Parrot. Rangers reported an increase in poaching and illegal fishing, to which they responded with increased patrols; detected and destroyed 5 marijuana fields;

and halted two illegal logging operations that resulted in charges against 6 persons and 2 convictions.

#### RAISING A SECOND DEBT SWAP WITH TREASURY

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¶9. Regardless of differences over the Foundation, Oversight Committee members were enthusiastic about a second debt swap, which Osorio valued at USD 3.5 million. While attending the November 7-9 Environmental Fund Network for Latin America and the Caribbean (Red de Fondos Ambientales de Latinoamerica y el Caribe -REDLAC), Andrade and REO raised the recommendation with Department of Treasury official Katie Berg. Berg took the request under consideration, noted the requirements to be met, and observed that the delay in implementing the Foundation did not strengthen the case for a second swap. She emphasized that more detailed reporting from NGOs on the fruits of their expenditures would be useful, and inquired how administrative fees authorized by the agreement were used.

#### PUNTA GORDA: NOT ON THE WAY FROM ANYWHERE TO ANYWHERE ELSE

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¶10. TIDE Director Wil Meheia confirmed that he planned to leave TIDE in December to run for the national legislature. Frustrated with a government unresponsive to Toledo District needs, Meheia is founding a new political party that will combat corruption and promote local NGO takes on environmental issues.

¶11. Belize's last Caribbean cultural outpost before the Mayan culturesscape straddling the Guatemalan border, Punta Gorda's few thousands are a mix of Creole (African-European), Garifuna (Carib-African), Mestizo, and Mayan peoples, with a small but

economically important population of East Indians, Chinese, and Mennonites. Relatively untouched by beach or cruise ship-driven development, a new road and six-hour drive from the capital has not overcome Punta Gordans' self-perception as out of sight and out of mind to Belmopan. Enough adventure tourists and aficionados of puntarock (modernized Garifuna rhythms) reach Punta Gorda to justify adding 2 or even 3 stories to the family homes-cum-inns lining the shore. Outside the town, bed and breakfasts, farms and fishing lodges seek to bolster eco-tourism in Toledo District. Their expatriate owners are not a new phenomenon, as the graves of Confederate refugees testify.

¶12. Toledo District hosts many NGOs and sustainable development efforts, of which TIDE is the most successful. The Toledo Association for Tourism and Empowerment (TASTE), a consortium of tourist businesses in the district, administers idyllic Sopadilla Cays. Various Mayan community organizations support (with Peace Corps help) the marketing of wood crafts and other products, offer Mayan village homestays, and administer community lands, including the dramatic Rio Blanco falls. British organic chocolate maker Black and Green, purveyors of the orange-accented "Maya Gold" dark chocolate bars, worked with the local cacao growers to replant with native cacao - genetic tests, it claimed, show that it is the original source stock. Local boosters are planning a 2007 cacao festival in the nearby, evocative Mayan ruins of Lubaantun, where, some claim, the cacao tree was first cultivated.

#### LANGDALE